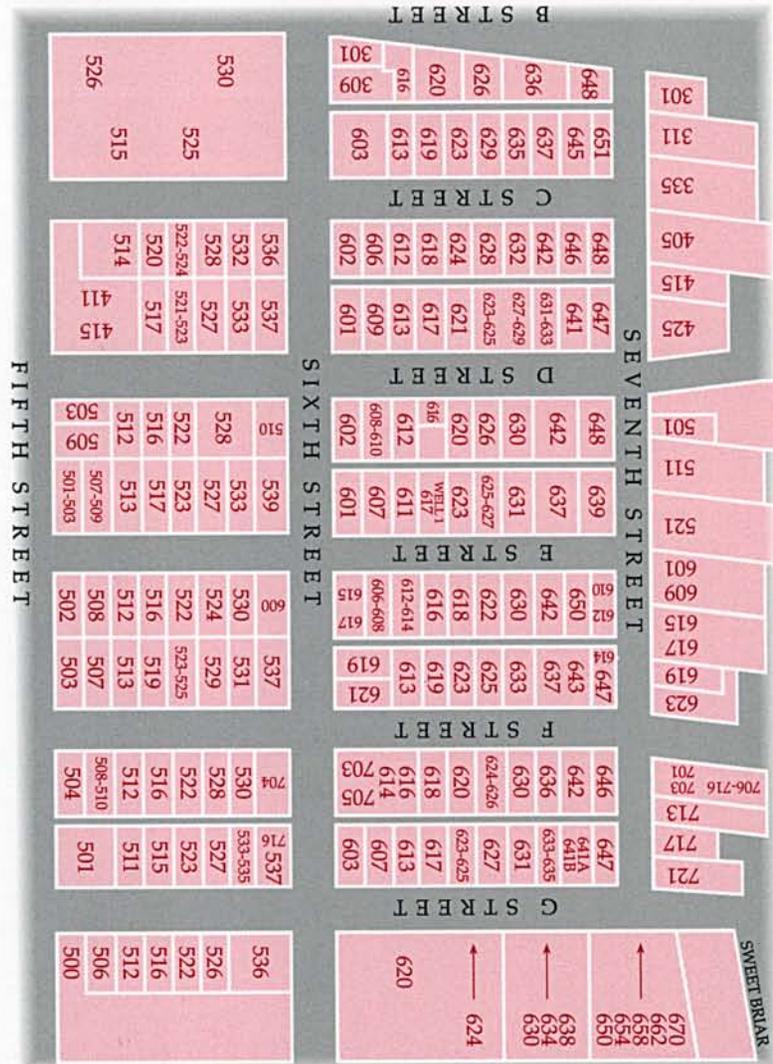


**CALIFORNIA/TRAVEL/HISTORY**

**\$10.95**

The Old North district of Davis, California is a rare, surviving pre-suburban neighborhood – a frozen-in-time example of what American cities and towns were like before World War II. This guide in hand, move back in time and immerse yourself in a virtually intact fragment of a vanished America.



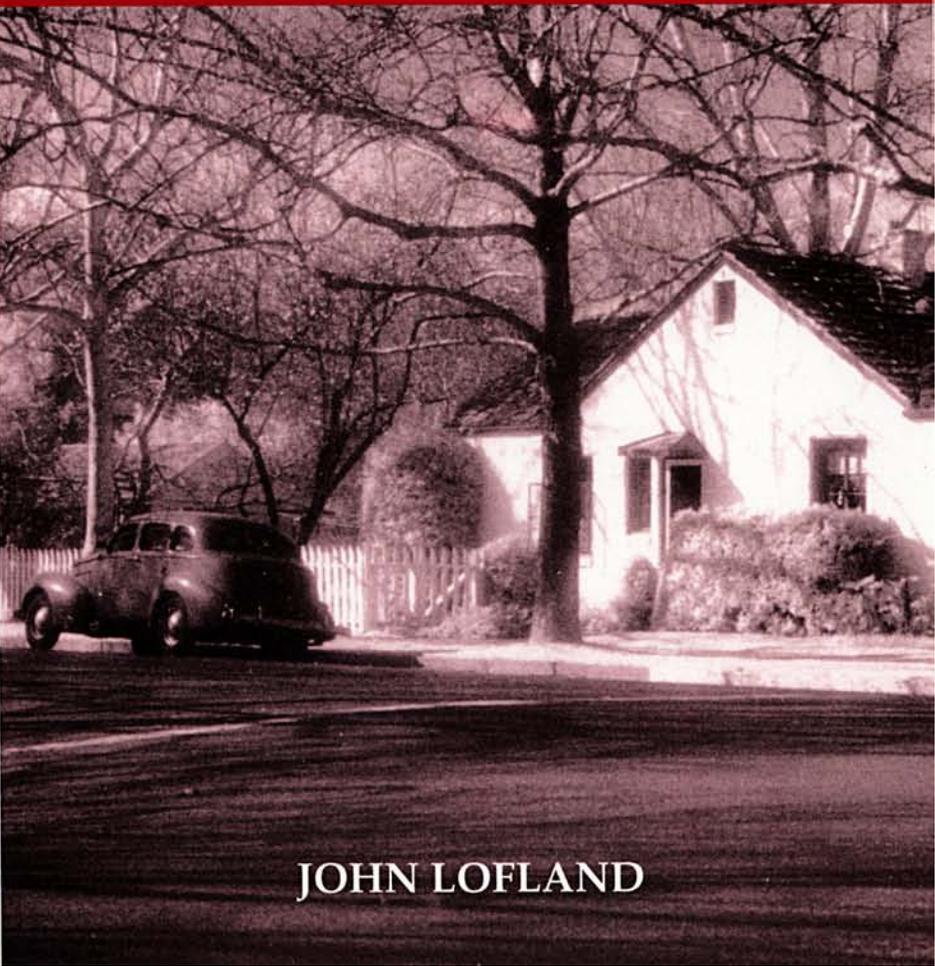
**OLD NORTH DAVIS**

Guide to Walking a Traditional Neighborhood

**LOFLAND**



Guide to walking a traditional neighborhood



**JOHN LOFLAND**



**Quick reference walking map of Old North Davis**

ISBN: 1-892626-05-5



6 781892 626059

# OLD NORTH DAVIS

Guide to walking a traditional neighborhood

JOHN LOFLAND



*Yolo County Historical Society  
Woodland, California*

# OLD NORTH DAVIS

*Guide to Walking a  
Traditional Neighborhood*

JOHN LOFLAND

*Yolo County Historical Society  
Woodland, California*

Copyright © 1999 by the Yolo County Historical Society

No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher, except for fair use as defined by United States copyright law.

Published by the Yolo County Historical Society  
Post Office Box 1447  
Woodland, California 95776

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Lofland, John.

Old North Davis : guide to walking a traditional neighborhood /  
John Lofland

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN 1-892626-05-5

1. Old North (Davis, Calif.)—Guidebooks. 2. Davis (Calif.)—  
Guidebooks. 3. Old North (Davis, Calif.)—History. 4. Davis  
(Calif.)—History. 5. Walking—California—Davis—Guidebooks.

I. Yolo County Historical Society. II. Title.

F869.D27L64 1999

917.94'51—dc21

98-38074

CIP

Cover photograph Norman Riley  
Cover map Davis Department of Public Works  
Cover design Dino Gay  
Book design and composition Davis Research  
Printing Walsworth Printing

# Contents

Overview: *Old North Where, Why, What* 5

## I GUIDES TO HISTORY 12

1. Old North Features: *A Traditional Neighborhood* 13
2. Davis History: *Context of the Old North* 33
3. Old North History: *Beginning and Development* 53

## II GUIDES TO STREETS AND HOMES 78

4. G Street: *Commerce on the Eastern Edge* 81
5. F Street: *The Traffic Artery* 93
6. E Street: *The Geographical Center* 103
7. D Street: *Post-War Scars Amid Pre-War Splendor* 119
8. C Street: *An Intact Enclave* 137
9. B Street: *Park Events on the Western Edge* 151

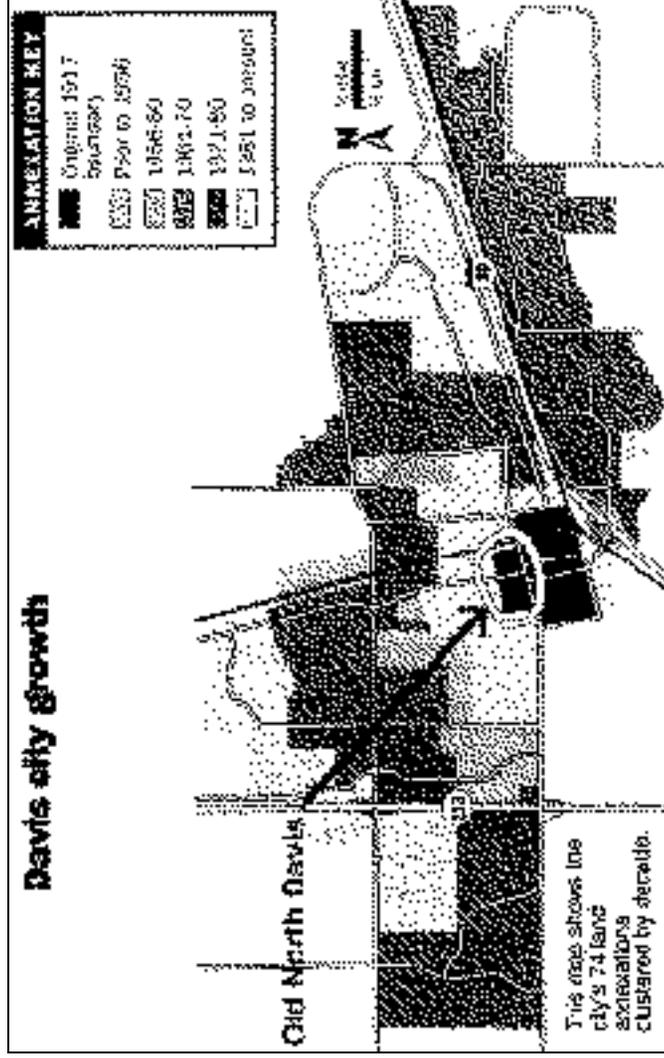
Epilogue: *What Future for the Old North?* 161

Acknowledgments, Sources, Limits 171

Sources 177

Index 183

About the Author 191



**Q. 1.** The physical and historical location of the Old North neighborhood in Davis, California. Based on City of Davis sources, this adapted Davis Enterprise map by Nathaniel Levine displays the original city and its major parks and areas of growth to 1980 (LE, 8-4-96). (Courtesy The Davis Enterprise)

## Overview

### *Old North Where, Why, What*

This is an historical and walking guide to a traditional (a pre-1945) neighborhood in Davis, California—an enclave termed variously the Old North, the North Core, and Bowers Addition. Adjacent to the Downtown or “Core Area” of Davis, the great bulk of the homes in this 12-block district were built one-at-a-time over the 1910s, ‘20s, ‘30s and ‘40s.

Its character was therefore set by the time of World War II and this form has survived more or less intact to this day. It is a makeup that often elicits the adjectives “cute,” “charming,” and “romantic,” and the neighborhood is commonly regarded as a quaint hold-over of a bygone era.

In this Overview I want:

- first**, to locate the Old North geographically;
- second**, to address the question of why anyone might care to know about such a neighborhood;
- third**, to provide an overview of this guide; and
- last**, to address issues of the privacy of Old North residents as related to this guide.

### **Where: Location of the Old North**

Where is the Old North and what are its boundaries? Let’s look at two maps that answer these questions—one of Davis and one of the Old North itself.

The original city plat or “grid” for Davis was drawn up in 1868 as a commercial venture and invention of a land speculation company (similar to the way a great many Western towns were initially created). A one-half by one-third mile rectangle eight blocks wide and four blocks deep, this grid set the city boundaries at the streets now named First, B, Fifth and J. In Fig. O.1, this original grid is most of the solid black area south of the hand-drawn ring circling the Old North neighborhood.

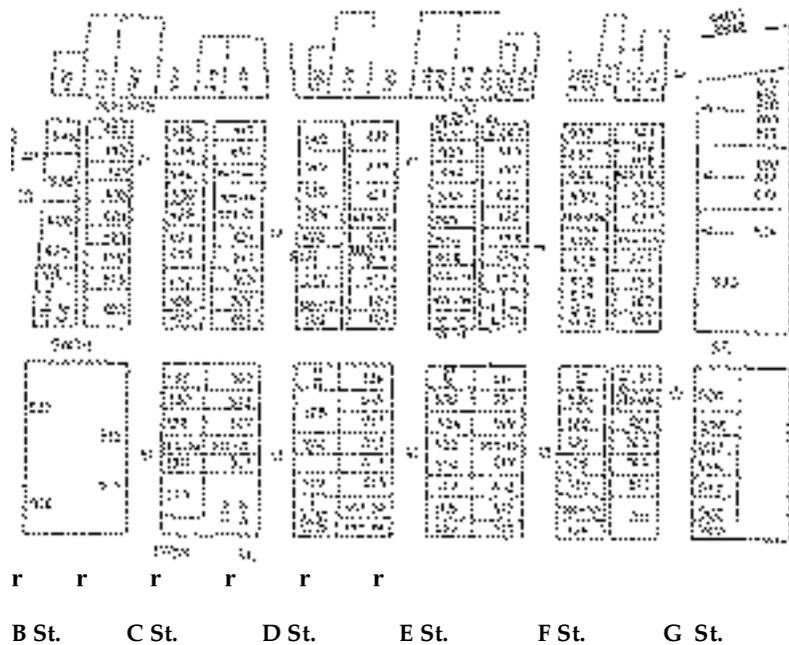
The fact that two major railroads intersected at what is now Davis is the reason these land speculators invented the town—one candidate name for which was Verandah City. As the “proprietors of Davisville” (the name of the land partnership) predicted, a railroad intersection would provide a stage for commerce and, hence, a real town formed and grew.

Growth was not especially fast and one of the first significant city expansions was the 1913 creation of five blocks of residential lots bounded by Sixth, Seventh, B and G streets. The lead developer—C. W. Bowers—named the area after himself and it was marketed as “Bowers Addition to the City of Davisville.” Combined with a quasi-developed strip of six blocks immediately to its south, the Old North as a developed area outside the original city grid thus came into being. It is circled and labeled in Fig. O.1.

As is clear in Fig. O.1, the City of Davis has grown quite considerably in land area from the original one-half by one-third mile grid. It now stretches some seven miles east to west and from a few to several miles north to south. Within that expanse the Old North is a rectangle about one-third of a mile east to west and one-quarter of a mile north to south.

Within this context of the city as a whole, of what, more precisely does the district consist? A geographical answer to this question is given in Fig. O.2, which is an excerpt from a City of Davis Department of Public Works map and shows, in addition to streets, parcels of separately recorded properties, of which there are almost 200. These parcels are arrayed over two tiers of six blocks each and the faceblock along the north side of Seventh Street.

Both historically and at present, the social and physical boundaries of the Old North are quite clear. On the south, it is separated from the Downtown by the four-lane traffic chasm that is Fifth Street. On the north, three of the six main north-south streets dead end at or near Seventh Street. At Seventh and north of it, the dominant structures change from homes built before 1950 to large apartments constructed in the 1950s and later. Until the late 1940s, Seventh Street was the city limit and the area to the north was rural.



O.2. Old North street and lot map. (Excerpt from City of Davis Department of Public Works map of Davis, 1996)

The other two boundaries are even sharper. To the east, the north-south railroad creates a social break, just as railroads do most everywhere. To the west, at B Street, the boundary is a two-block, mostly open field belonging, historically, to the school district and, more recently, to the City of Davis.

### Why: So Who Cares?

One can well and properly ask “Why should I bother to learn about such an area?” Let me report three types of answers to this question: those of the urban explorer, the heritage steward, and the mountain climber.

**1. THE URBAN EXPLORER.** For urban explorers the first and most noticeable thing about the Old North is that it is an instance of a larger category labeled the *traditional neighborhood*. Such neighborhoods have distinctive physical and design features setting them off from post-1945 neighborhoods. In recent years an increasing number of reflective people have come to believe that suburban neighborhood designs have been a huge mistake in the United States and that we must move back to more traditional

modes of residential organization (Kunstler 1993, 1996 provides reviews). New construction and developments so inspired are, accordingly, termed “neo-traditional” (Consumer Reports 1996).

But there is also, of course, the “real thing” that neo-traditionalism imitates. So, people trying to revive the traditional in neo-traditionalism are well advised first to study and to understand the original. The Old North is very much the original thing and, therefore, of great interest to the urban explorer.

It is with this interest in mind (for I am myself an urban explorer) that I have organized important portions of this guide in terms of the profile of detailed features of a traditional neighborhood that can be observed in the Old North. This is, indeed, the central topic of the next chapter, where some two dozen features of traditional neighborhoods seen in the Old North are described.

Moreover, one of the special features of the traditional neighborhood is the hodge-podge of accretions and layers of structures and spatial arrangements that varied and independent people have devised over many years. The notion of a “master planned” community finds its antithesis in the traditional neighborhood. Within limits, every home-builder has had her or his own plan rather than a “master plan.” The upshot is that traditional neighborhoods are studded with architectural, design, and other surprises. These include odd structures, structures in unexpected locations, improbable objects and projects in yards, and passageways between mysterious points. Walking and observing in a traditional neighborhood is an adventure in pleasantly jarring juxtapositions and amusing curiosities—especially if one is alert and knows what to look for (L. Lofland, 1998). In the walking guide chapters of Part II, I call attention to a number of such surprises—but certainly not to all of them. Walkers will want to make their own discoveries.

**2. THE HERITAGE STEWARD.** Heritage steward answers to the question of “Why should I care?” are not incompatible with urban explorer answers. Rather, they are broader and more encompassing and frame the question as, “Why are older, built environments important to us?”

Answers to this question are coupled to the assertion that certain parts of the historic built environment or heritage ought to be preserved or conserved (the reference of the term stewardship).

Cast in broadest terms, heritage stewards offer three answers to the question of why one should care about (and therefore sometimes conserve) areas such as the Old North.

There is, *first*, the visual appeal or aesthetic answer: “Fine buildings, towns and landscapes have an immediate—indeed often

quite spectacular—visual appeal. We derive deep and lasting pleasure from living and working in them, visiting them, studying them in depth or simply having them there as the backdrop of our daily lives. More specifically, we appreciate them as examples of artistic and technical achievement” (Bottomley and Hague 1996, 4).

*Second*, attention to historic built environments is repaid with “insight into the life of previous generations” that is not available through the written word alone. “As Ruskin said, ‘without architecture we cannot remember’” (Bottomley and Hague 1996, 4).

*Third*, and more deeply, “historic buildings and monuments, towns and landscapes . . . speak not only of what has gone before. They also tell us about ourselves. They help define our identity as products of, and heirs to, cultures which are long-established, highly developed and continually evolving. The sense of stability and continuity which this provides is something most people prize highly—not least in times of rapid change” (Bottomley and Hague 1996, 4).

A 1990 White Paper on the environment by the government of the United Kingdom combines these three answers in a statement underscoring heritage stewardship as an important public policy. “[Historic environments] remind us of our past, of how our forebears lived, and how our culture and society have developed. They tell us what earlier generations aspired to and achieved. They provide the context for new buildings, and for changes in our way of life. They teach us lessons for the future” (English Heritage 1995, 34).

To summarize, the urban explorer views the Old North through the lens of forms of human settlement whereas the perspective of the heritage steward focuses on all forms of past human accomplishments surviving in “historic environments.” Although both perspectives are broad, that of the heritage steward is perhaps wider and deeper than that of the urban explorer.

**3. THE MOUNTAIN CLIMBER.** All the above aside, there is the “Why did you climb the mountain?” question and answer: because it’s there. This is, frankly, my favorite.

Simply living in or near something and having recurrent opportunities or needs to look at that something can create interest in knowing more about what is “out there” in the environment. So, simply living (or merely being) in Davis, California (or wherever) stimulates a degree of curiosity about “things Davis” (or wherever).

“Why should I care?” is in this case “because it is there, right in front of you.” Where in the world did all these old houses come from? Who built them, when, and why? Why do they look the

way they do? What, at base, do the things immediately around us mean?

### **What: Overview of This Guide**

I divide our journey to the Davis Old North into two main parts.

**Part I** addresses three separate but interrelated topics:

- the district's *features* as an example of a traditional neighborhood (Ch. 1),
- the larger context of the *history of Davis* (Ch. 2), and,
- the *history of the Old North* itself (Ch. 3).

**Part II** consists of six chapters, one on each of the six north-south streets—in reverse alphabetical order, G through B. Each street is characterized and a number of homes and other structures on it are described.

In an **Epilogue** I try to guess what the future of the Old North is likely to be.

As a product of a research process, this guide has its own history, enormous debts to other people, and some inevitable limitations. I report these in the section titled **Acknowledgments, Sources, Limits** following the **Epilogue**.

### **Local History and Resident Privacy**

Users of this guide will likely want to walk the Old North streets with it in hand. Done quietly and in groups of no more than two or three, this is not a problem. I urge, though, that groups be kept this small. One reliable generalization about group size and verbal behavior is: the larger the group, the louder the talk. Therefore, the way to keep talk quiet is to keep groups small.

In order to protect the privacy of Old North residents, I have followed a policy of never using the name of any resident who was living at the time of publication unless I had her or his permission to do so. A number have given me such permission and are mentioned by name in this guide. Use of their names does *not*, however, mean that they are inviting people to knock on their doors. I plead with visitors to respect the privacy of these people by not approaching them. And, please extend the same courtesies and right-to-be-left-alone to all other residents of the Old North, the great majority of whom are not named.

